

Editorial: Convention success we can build on

September 7, 2008

Oklahoma delegate Wayne Janoe still remembers his first glimpse of Minnesota last weekend. Flying in for the Republican National Convention, Janoe looked out as his plane broke through the clouds and saw the state waiting below. "The lakes. All the lakes!" he said, still marveling at the sight even as he readied to return home late this week.

The politicians have packed up. The custodians, sweeping up confetti as Xcel Energy Center morphs from hockey mom central to the home of the Minnesota Wild. You can almost hear the deep breath being taken around the state: The RNC's historic, tumultuous four-day run is over. And like Janoe, many of our 45,000-plus visitors are leaving with plans to spread the word about the scenic, friendly yet cosmopolitan city in which they just gathered.

"Definitely, I want to come back for a vacation," said Janoe, who was pleasantly surprised that the urban center of a Democratic-leaning state could be as friendly as his hometown of Antlers, Okla.

To everyone who planned, volunteered, policed or devoted their time in any other way to making the RNC the success that it was, congratulations and thank you. From Monday through Thursday, we were the center of the political universe and, for the most part, we looked great. Everyone from Fox News to the London Times lauded our Guthrie Theater, stunning riverfront, September sunshine and Midwestern friendliness. "We waited 116 years to host a convention like this, and something tells me that we won't be waiting as long in the future," Sen. Norm Coleman said via e-mail.

Pulling this off under the best of circumstances was no small feat. With the unprecedented challenge that shaped this convention even before its start, this was a major accomplishment. What other host cities have had a convention put on hurricane hold? And while Denver saw its share of political protests, the angriest protesters made their stand here.

Were we perfect? Of course not. Who could be? While delegates didn't hand us "Your comments, please" cards as they left Friday, many mixed a dose of constructive criticism into their generous praise. Su Kemper, an alternate delegate from Nevada, said the Xcel was a classy facility but she thought having the delegates spread out in three cities (St. Paul, Minneapolis and Bloomington) made it unclear where the event's epicenter was. Ram Krishna, a guest accompanying an Arizona delegate, felt similarly. His daughter wanted to enjoy Minneapolis nightlife. But the cab ride from their St. Paul hotel was \$27 one way, and Krishna worried about her safety because they didn't know the area.

In the days ahead, we'll get a more accurate sense of the convention's economic impact (businesses are still tallying up) and its true effect on the Twin Cities' national profile. One significant question mark: the protests' impact on Minnesota. Police grappled with a persistent and determined group of troublemakers. Unfortunately, some journalists -- including 51-year-old Amy Goodman of Democracy Now! and two of her producers -- were among those swept up in the arrests, a troubling and un-Minnesota development.

On Thursday, Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak said he "can't wait" to host another convention this size. Can't say we're ready for that quite yet.

But we do agree with him on this point: Cooperation around the region made this convention possible. That's a foundation on which to tackle some of our most pressing problems, such as transportation and growth. That's an RNC legacy that will be valuable long after the balloons at the Xcel are but a distant memory.

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